



ROLE OF PIR-FAKIR CULTURE IN MUSLIM SOCIETY: A CASE STUDY OF BANKURA DISTRICT

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ABSTRACT

Sufism originated with the spread of Islam in Arabia by Hazrat Muhammad (Sa.). The word Sufi is derived from Alsuffa. Sufi power was the main channel of Islam's entry into India. People named Sufis, Dervishes, Fakirs, Pirs, etc., who originally came from Persia, took the propagation of Islam as the main vow of life at that time. The word Pir is Persian. Literally it means 'wise'. Essentially, one who is experienced in attaining Allah or connecting spiritually with Allah is called Pir Sahib. Those who are called Auliya, Murshid and Shaykh in Quran Sharif and Hadith Sharif are called Pir Saheb in Persian. The word Murshid in Arabic means guide. The one who teaches to follow the commands and prohibitions of Almighty Allah is called Murshid or Guide. Which is called Pir in Persian. The one who trains to obey the commandments of Almighty Allah is called pir. From the beginning of the eleventh century, groups of Islamic preachers started coming to this country and with their tireless efforts, Islam began to spread. - The contribution of Sadhaks, Pir-Darbeshes, Aul-Baulds was very high. The culture of Pir Fakirs entered the Bankura district on the basis of Sufis, Pirs, Darbes, Auliyas spreading Islam in Bengal. Even though Bankura district was a peripheral region of Bengal, it was not free from the contact of Islam. Sufi saints entered the district out of their desire and propagated Islam. Pirs, fakirs were spread in different parts of the district to propagate their ideology. The ideals of Sufism enthralled the district residents. As a result we see Muslims in this district. 1908 A.D. and from O'Malley's work several Pirs were found in the tombs. Which we refer to as 'shrines'. At this time, he mentioned eight peers of Indas police station.

KEYWORDS: Allah, Alsuffa, Pir, Auliya, Dervish, Khanka, Murshid, Fakir, Baul, Shrine, Islam

INTRODUCTION

Sufism originated with the spread of Islam in Arabia by Hazrat Muhammad (PBUH). The word Sufi is derived from Alsuffa. Sufi power was the main channel of Islam's entry into India. People named Sufis, Dervishes, Fakirs, Pirs, etc., who originally came from Persia, took the propagation of Islam as the main vow of life at that time. The word Pir is Persian. Literally it means 'wise'. Essentially, one who is experienced in attaining Allah or connecting spiritually with Allah is called Pir Sahib. Those who are called Auliya, Murshid and Shaykh in Quran Sharif and Hadith Sharif are called Pir Saheb in Persian. The word Murshid in Arabic means guide. The one who trains to follow the commands and prohibitions of Almighty Allah is called Murshid or Guide. Which is called Pir in Persian. One who trains to follow the commands and prohibitions of Almighty Allah is called Pir. The role of the Persian-speaking Auliya Kirams in the spread of Islam in Pak India and the conversion of local heathens to Islam is important. From the beginning of the eleventh century, groups of Islamic preachers began to come to this country and with their tireless efforts, Islam began to spread. The contributions of generous tolerant Sufi-sadhaks, Pir-Dervishes, Aul-Baulds were much greater than activity.

In the context of the time, the message of Islam evoked quite a response at that time. Arousing this response, many saints from far and wide like Arabia, Persia, Baghdad, Khorasan, Mecca, Yemen, Delhi, Multan came to Bengal and settled and

preached. Islam's message of monotheism and equal rights of man appealed to the masses. Sheikh Zaluddin Tabrizi (RA), who is buried at Pandua, reached Lucknow in 1213 AD and preached Islam and Sufism to the east of Tirobha in 1225 (1244). The contribution of Sheikh Jalaluddin (RA) and his murids was immense for the propagation of Islam in Malda and Dinajpur districts. According to his name Deotla became Tabrizabad. Sheikh Sharafuddin Abu Tawama (RA) probably arrived at Sonargaon in Dhaka by 1278 and was buried here in 1300. His disciple Sheikh Sharfuddin Yahya Maneri (R.A.) returned to Maner in Janmabhoomi Bihar in 1293 and vowed to spread Islam. His contemporary Pir Badruddin (RA) stayed in Chittagong for a long time. He died in 1400 in Bihar Sharif. Many people assume that the famous 'Pir Badar' of Chittagong is a different person from Badaruddin. Arriving with 360 followers and buried in Sylhet, Shah Jalal (RA) played a prominent role in spreading Islam in the region after the conquest of Sylhet in 1303. He died in 1347.¹

Shah Safiuddin (RA) buried in Pandua in Hooghly, Sheikh Akhi Sirajuddin (RA) of Lucknow, Sheikh Alaul Haque (RA) buried in Pandua and his son Noor Qatub-ul-Alam (RA) played a prominent role in the propagation of Islam. Sheikh Akhi Siraj, a disciple of Nizamuddin Auliya (r.a.) was a Bengali-caste. He established a library at Lucknow. He is the promoter of Chintia Silsila in Bengal. Alaul Haque (RA) opened Khankas and Langarkhanas at Pandua and Sonargaon. Creation of 'Alai-Tarika' according to his name. It is also known as

Tarikakhalidiya. He is said to be a descendant of the famous general Khalid-bin Walid. Emergence of 'Nuri Tariqa' named after Nur Qutb. Sheikh Hossain Zukharpos (RA) was a murid of Alaul. He founded the Hossaini Tariqa.²

Although it is not possible to know the exact names and birthplaces or places of preaching or shrines of all, but from the location of the dargahs and shrines, it can be said with certainty that it is vast from Sylhet-Chittagong in the east to Mangalkot in Burdwan and in the south from Bagerhat and Chhota Pandua to Kantaduar in Dinajpur district in the north. The area was their workplace. Many of them were spiritualist poets-researchers and theologians. But their activities were not confined to the confines of Khankas or shrines and spread to remote areas of the country and influenced people from all walks of life. Many people of this country have embraced Islam after being attracted by the honest and simple way of life, gentle manners, truthfulness, kindness, preaching and high-level discourse of these Sufi-pir dervishes. They were generous and tolerant as they were interested in the most simple tasks. Spirituality was more valuable to them than rituals as prescribed by Shariat. Love of God was the key. Hence, they were more tolerant of local old customs than orthodox ulema. This generosity of religion and kind attitude towards newly initiated Hindu-Buddhists brought out the liberal side of Islam and increased the interest of local residents in Islam.

The culture of Pir Fakir entered the Bankura district on the basis of Sufis, Pirs, Dervishes, Auliyas spreading Islam in Bengal. Even though Bankura district was a peripheral region of Bengal, it was not free from the contact of Islam. Sufi saints entered the district out of their desire and propagated Islam. Pirs, fakirs were spread in different parts of the district to propagate their ideology. The siktars of Sufism enthralled the district residents. As a result we see Muslims in this district. 1908 A.D. and from Mallee's work several Pirs were found in the tombs. Which we refer to as 'shrines'. He mentions eight Pirs of Indas Thana at this time, namely Shah Madar of Roll, Bandegi Shah Mustafa at Chichinga, Syed Muhammad Hussain and Shah Kabir of Karisunda, Satya Pir in a field south of Hayathnagar, Bura Pir at Chaksukur. Shah Bandegi in Bihar and Shah Ismail Ganj Lashkar in Lakhipur. There are also shrines of Pirs at Patharchati in Kotulpur Police Station and Piruskarni Fakirbera in Gangajalghati Police Station; And in the city of Bishnupur, there is a shrine of a Pir named Shah Qurban Ali.³ Incidentally: Based on the information obtained from the mentioned field survey sources, we are convinced that O'Malley said, the shrine of Piruskarini Fakirbera of Gangajalghati Khana is the burial place of Shah Ismailganj Lashkar located at Piruskur in Katabandh village of Barajora thana. Based on the census report it can be said that there were no Muslims in Gangajalghati police station and even today the number of Muslims in this police station is very less. Or it is true that then Bara Jora was included in Gangajalghati police station. And the present shrine of Patharchatti is the tomb of Dastgir Shah Ismail Gazi. Besides, the tomb of Miran Shah in Raipur of Raipur Thana is famous throughout the district. Regarding the mention of Pirotta land in official documents, there is mention of Pir Azgobi Saheb's shrine in Betur village

of Patrasayer police station. From the field survey we also found the shrines of some Pir Fakirs. For example, Pir Chin Kilich Khan in Rasulpur village of Patrasayer police station,⁴ Naghinsi Pir Baba's shrine in Birsinghpur of Onda police station, Another notable shrine of this police station is Azmat Azmi Baba's shrine in Panishol village.⁵ Tombs of Dihe village of Barjora police station and Baba Byaghraray of Satya Pirtala and Chowrasta of Sonamukhi police station and Deuli shrine of Manhumhari village were found. Besides, Syed Hazrat Noor Muhammad shrine and Madanmohanpur shrine in Narkeldanga of Jaipur police station. The only pilgrimage site in Bankura city is the shrine of Khakisha at Idgamhalla, little known due to long neglect. However, there are two unidentified Fakir shrines on the north side of Nungola Road. And there are two Satyapir Thanas, one at Saudagar Gali, another at the junction of Badshahi Road and Bara Shoalana Gali. A dervish shrine named after Ashrafi Baba was built twenty-five years ago in Badulara village of Sadar police station.⁶

It is mentioned that geographically, most of the pirsthans are in Kotulpur and Jaipur police stations adjacent to Hooghly district in the eastern part of the former Malla Rajya and in Barjora, Indas, Patrasair police stations adjacent to Bardwan district in the north. A pier is located in Raipur on the south bank of the Kansavati River in South Bankura. The only notable fakir shrines are Shah Bharang in Fakir Danga of present-day Patrasayer police station, and the shrine of Baba Azmat Azmir of Panishol village. At present, in terms of Muslim population in the district, it can be seen that the population is high in Barajor, Sonamukhi, Patrasayer, Indas, Kotulpur and Bishnupur police stations. Comparatively South-West Bankura has less Muslim population. However, the population increased after the formation of the district and the Muslim population that existed in the district before that. The 1891 census report clearly shows that there were no Muslims in Gangajalghati police station. But currently Muslim population is observed in this thana. But it was very less than other thana.

Reasons for arrival of Pir Sahibs: Bankura district was not dominated by Muslims like other districts of Bengal like Khulna, Dhaka, Mymensingh, Chittagong, Burdwan, Murshidabad and Hooghly. The arrival of Pir Sahibs in all these districts of Bengal coincided with the spread of Islam. Many Pir Sahibs from Arabia by sea came to these districts of East Bengal for the purpose of preaching the religion. But the spread of Islam in Bankura district took place much later although the environmental conditions in Bankura district were not unfavorable for the spread of Islam. But it is true that Bankura district was a remote area surrounded by forests. Just as there was no communication by water, the land route was full of complications. Hence we find that areas in Bankura district adjacent to Burdwan Hooghly Medinipur have a higher Muslim population than Central Bankura and South West Bankura. Panchal, Ond, Radhanagar, Dadimukho, Brindabanpur, Chandar, Ramharipur etc. regions have no Muslims living today. But there was no obstacle to the arrival of Pir Fakir's culture in the public life of Bankura. This universal syncretistic Pir Fakir culture was the embodiment of the conflict that a religious message created in Bengali life as a result of the changes in the state system in Bengal in the Middle

Ages. Therefore, to understand the nature of this Pir Fakir culture in Bankura district, it is necessary to discuss briefly about their arrival and spread.

The influx of Sufi pir-fakir dervishes from West and Central Asia through North India spread to numerous villages and towns throughout Bengal in the fifteenth century. At that time, Ilyas Shahi dynasty was ruling (1445-1493) in Bengal. Under their influence, the worship of five pirs Satyapir, Ghorapir, Manikpir, Kumbhirpir and Madari Pir appeared in Bengal.⁷ Sufis, saints dervishes, many people from the exploited classes of the society converted to Islam. It is believed that the influence of the fakirs worked well. In support of this opinion, the example of Srihatte Shah Jalal's preaching is mentioned.⁸ Besides, we can talk about Khwaja Moinuddin Chishti (RA) who came to India. His honest character, generous attitude and eloquent speech, possessed of miraculous powers-achieved incredible success in the propagation of Islam. However, in all cases there is no question whether the influence of the lifestyle of the Pir-Dervesh-Fakirs was sufficient to attract people of other religions to embrace Islam. Because not all of the pirs adopted the high lifestyle and walked on the pure spiritual path. Some of them took the oath of war as heroes of the Nawab's army and engaged in the conquest of the kingdom and were accused of plotting against the Nawab to establish an independent state under conditions favorable to military success and were sentenced to death and beheaded by the sword of the state assassin. Moreover, some of the pirs were married family members. So there is no reason to think that Hindus were motivated to accept Islam only because of their greatness of character. Despite the establishment of many dargahs in Bankura district and in Indas and Barjora police stations adjacent to Burdwan district, in Kotulpur police station adjacent to Hooghly district, and in Jaipur and Bishnupur police stations, the spread of Islam in this district could not make any mark.

Rameshchandra Majumdar emphasizes the strategic rather than the ideological aspect as the reason for the Pirs' success in proselytizing in Bengal. According to him, before the Muslim invasion, the common people believed in various miraculous powers of Tantric Sadhu or Guru due to the strong influence and prestige of Tantric religion in Bengal. That is why they were worshiped by common people. Their residences were also considered places of pilgrimage. After the Muslim conquest of Bengal, the Sufis, Pirs, Dervishes displaced the Tantric saints and converted their residences into dargahs. Gradually they also gained the reputation of possessing miraculous powers. Common people believed that Pirs are able to relieve people's sufferings, transfer life into the body of dead people, take the lives of living people by magic, judge people's future or blindly, at the same time be in different places and fulfill the wishes of devotees. Based on such belief and attracted by the greatness of the place, people used to come to Pir's dargah and accept Islam.⁹

According to Dr. Kalikaranjan Kanungo, the Buddhist monasteries and Hindu temples which were destroyed during the Turko-Afghan military campaign, the saints who were dedicated to spread Islam (1) so that the Hindus and Buddhists

could not rebuild their monasteries and temples and (2) Because of the tradition of the previous place so that they came and appear. Either with these two purposes, he used to build dargahs and khankas everywhere. As a result they forgot the memory of the old gods and goddesses and followed the new missionaries and abandoned their religion.¹⁰

In the case of Bankura district, Dr. Kanungo's opinion is somewhat similar. For example, the location of a Dargah in Bihar village of Indas police station has already been mentioned. The dargah of Burapir at Chaksukur is reminiscent of the 'Buro Dharma' Thakurthan of Bishnupur. The location of Satya Pir in a field south of Hiatnagar village is also of special significance. Because in the village of Bankura, the places of many secular gods and goddesses can still be seen in the fields under the trees and on the banks of the ponds. Therefore, it can be said that the relevance of Majumdar and Kanungo's opinion as the reason for the emergence of pirthans at least in Indas and Jaipur police stations of Bankura district is not completely absent.

But contrary to Dr. Kanungo's opinion, Sufis and Pir Dervishes were strict followers of Hadith and Quran. Then it is stated in the Qur'an 'لَكُمْ دِينُكُمْ وَلِيَ دِينِ' 'Lakum Dinukum Walia Deen' meaning your religion is with you and his religion is with him'.¹¹ The Holy Quran has given the right to practice religion in that case. How can Sufis and pir dervishes forcefully destroy Buddhist-Hindu traditional temples? If it is thought that they destroyed the temple then it is against the injunctions of the Qur'an and Hadith but it is unimaginable for the Sufis and Pirs. Actually neglected exploited oppressed lower caste Hindus were willingly accepting Islam. And they destroyed the temples which were symbols of oppression. If the Sufis and Pir Dervishes had forcibly destroyed the temples, they would not have survived the impact of time because the Hindu dominance in Bengal and Bankura district is considerable. In the spirit of revenge, shrines and dargahs were destroyed, but as guardians of time, it still stands. So it is clearly understood that Sufisadhaks or Pir Sahibs did not destroy any Buddhist-Hindu temples and build shrines. The local people and the then Mallabhum rulers played an important role in establishing these shrines at completely new places. Many of the Mallabhum rulers were happy with the miracles of Pir Saheb and donated land.

Fakirs also played an important role in spreading Islam in Bakura district. From the eighteenth century to the mid-nineteenth century, organized banditry by monks and fakir robbers of various sects from north-west India created a dire situation in rural Bengal. Fakirs of the Burhana community belonged to the larger Madari community and the chief leader of their clan took the title 'Shah'. There was a strong belief among people that fakirs, like pirs, had extraordinary miraculous powers. Therefore, in the eyes of the public, they were also seen with the status of a peer. Among them were many Hindus who believed in Sufi ideology. Official records of the British period have detailed descriptions of looters but do not distinguish between fakirs and sannyasins. The three terms Fakir, Sannyasi, Bairagi are used about them.¹² Dinajpur-Malda-Rangpur-Rajshahi-Mymensingh-Bogra districts are

their robbery areas, including Hooghly and Medinipur districts. They also caused panic in Bankura district. Most of the dargahs in Bankura district are of Madari-community pir-fakirs. The families served by Pirpukur and Patharchatti still belong to the Sha-Fakir community. The first servitors of the Birsinghpur shrine belonged to the Shah Fakir family. We believe that the right to serve the Lokpur shrine was initially with the sha-fakirs but later it came into the hands of the sheikhs.

In view of the above discussion we can say that the contribution of Pir Fakir culture was important behind the rise of Muslims in Bankura district as a marginal district of West Bengal. Pir Fakir sahibs in Hindu-dominated areas through their khankas and dargahs infused the masses with the love of God. Pir Sahebgan has heard about the Communism of Islam. As a result, the lower class people of the caste-ridden Hindu society have united themselves with the culture of these pir fakirs in the hope of liberation. And in the greatness of the miraculous powers of the Pirs, the so-called Mallabhum kings and zamindars and the local masses could not stay away from its influence. The charisma of Pir Saheb's miraculous power has reached far and wide. As a result, common people from different parts have come to the court of these Pir Sahebs for the purpose of getting rid of their diseases and other tranquility. Later Urs festival was conducted for three days as per a fixed schedule in these shrines. In the three-day Urs festival, people from all walks of life, regardless of caste, religion, caste, would gather to fulfill their heart's desires. It is noted that they used to swear at Pir Saheb's shrine to get their desired object. Some used to promise goat, some chicken, some cash, some chadar. These vows were made by childless couples hoping to get rid of various diseases or to have children. Both Hindus and Muslims used to gather in the Auras festival of the shrine. As a result, Hindu-Muslim communal harmony would have become stronger. People from both Hindu and Muslim communities used to come to the shrine on Thursday evenings and on Fridays to have their prayers granted. As a result, Urs festival of Satya Pir and Mazar is a message bearer of a successful example as a bridge of communal harmony and amalgamation in the public life of Bankura.

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